Sexting and Displacement of Pride in a Contemporary Digitised World

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Abstract

This study focuses on the impact of sexting on the sense of pride among digital technology users who communicate virtually anything with their digital devices such as the mobile phones, laptop or tablets. Interactions across digital platforms involve the exchange of pictures, videos and messages generally referred to as "sexts." The researchers relied on secondary data sources and identified both positive and negative dimensions of sexting. Findings of the study demonstrated that sexting affects individuals' sense of pride through vulnerability, exposure, objectification, unrealistic expectations, regret and shame. However, some positive outcomes of sexting are affirmation and exploration of one's sexuality, self-expression, intimacy as well as connections between partners involved in such communications. On the other hand, the researchers noted glaring negative effects prominent of which is the issue of diminishing self-esteem particularly when sexting is non-consensual. The coercion to sext can lead to feelings of powerlessness especially among those categorised as "victims" of the act. Gender and social dynamics also play a significant role in sexting. The researchers concluded that there is a correlation between digital communication and personal identity as acts such as sexting conducted in digital space can have dire consequences for an individual's sense of pride or self-esteem. It is, therefore, recommended, among several others, that digital literacy and education be promoted among young persons to teach them about risks and responsibilities associated with sexting in the digital age.

Keywords: digital natives, netizens, pride, sexting, social media

Sexting dan Peminggiran Rasa Bangga dalam Era Kontemporari Digital

Abstrak

Kajian ini meneliti kesan sexting terhadap rasa bangga dalam kalangan pengguna teknologi digital yang berkomunikasi secara maya melalui peranti seperti telefon pintar, komputer riba atau tablet. Interaksi melalui pelbagai platform digital melibatkan pertukaran gambar, video dan mesej yang lazimnya dirujuk sebagai "sext." Pengkaji menggunakan sumber data sekunder dan mengenal pasti kedua-dua dimensi positif dan negatif dalam sexting. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa sexting mempengaruhi rasa bangga individu melalui unsur kerentanan, pendedahan, pengobjekan, jangkaan tidak realistik, penyesalan dan rasa malu. Namun begitu, terdapat juga beberapa kesan positif daripada sexting seperti pengesahan dan penerokaan seksualiti diri, ekspresi kendiri, keintiman serta pengukuhan hubungan antara pasangan yang terlibat dalam Komunikasi sebegitu. Sebaliknya, penyelidik menegaskan kesan negatif yang ketara, terutamanya kemerosotan harga diri apabila sexting berlaku tanpa kerelaan. Paksaan untuk melakukan sexting boleh menimbulkan rasa tidak berdaya, khususnya dalam kalangan mereka yang dikategorikan sebagai "mangsa." Dinamika gender dan sosial turut memainkan peranan penting dalam fenomena ini. Pengkaji merumuskan bahawa terdapat hubung kait antara komunikasi digital dan identiti peribadi kerana amalan seperti sexting yang dilakukan dalam ruang digital boleh memberi kesan besar terhadap rasa bangga dan harga diri seseorang individu. Oleh itu, disarankan agar literasi digital dan pendidikan diperkasakan dalam kalangan golongan muda untuk mendidik mereka tentang risiko serta tanggungjawab berkaitan sexting dalam era digital.

Kata kunci: generasi digital, warganet, rasa bangga, sexting dan media sosial

Acknowledgment

Introduction

In our contemporary world, the use of digital technologies and new media (ICTs) has taken on a unique dimension. Access and ease-of-use to numerous technological tools created for communication in this century remains a critical factor. Mobile phones, tablets, and computers are also useful tools that revolutionised the communication architecture and patterns of our age and time. The digitised communication space is a long way coming from the time of smoke signals and now the Internet, mobile devices and even virtual reality and artificial intelligence. The change has been documented for varied reasons; one of which is to measure the level of growth of ICTs in general and how such inventions may have altered human communication systems and patterns.

Applications and devices that provide information-access and make electronic communication a possibility in the form of text messaging, video chatting, and so much more include smartphones, mobile phones, the Internet and laptops commonly known as ICTs (Schlomann et al., 2020). One of the most unique ICTs is the Internet, which plays a significant role in enabling communication between persons separated by physical distance. On a general note, ICTs connected to the web help facilitate broader access to digital information and a higher degree of interaction with family, friends, and even business partners.

Digital technologies have become useful to the point that they permeate and dissect all facets of society (Ciarli et al., 2021). The liberalised space has also led to unimagined volume of information exchange. Communication with web-connected ICTs where large data files can be exchanged in the era of 4G and 5G network connections is an important aspect. The change in communication is premised on information revolution characterised by an increase in the use of technology (Spaulding & Bjornsrud, 2023). This is driven by the ever-widening quest for information and the growing needs of the digital natives of the period. Individuals who grew up in the information age and surrounded by the presence of digital technology are called digital natives (Gillis, 2020). These individuals spend a substantial amount of time on their digital devices exchanging information.

Aside from information-exchange, digital platforms are used for the purpose of strengthening relationships. In

fact, digital platforms like social media are reported to have the capacity to affect relationship in both positive and negative dimensions. It is possible for users of social media platforms to stay connected with family and friends who live in distant places just as much as they help improve communication with children, partners and so on (Jarai, 2023). Among many other important benefits to relationships, the researcher averred that social media platforms are said to be responsible for a boost in connectivity, improved communication, and sexual gratification.

Of particular interest in respect of the benefits of social media to relationship is the impact on sexual gratification. According to Jarai (2023), social media help partners in romantic relationship achieve some form of sexual gratifications through consumption of pornography on certain platforms. This has also been validated through the study where findings showed that pornographic contents consumptions may lead to sexual gratifications in romantic relationship but the level to which it can be achieved is dependent on the individual's sexual compulsivity and confidence (Arikewuyo et al., 2019). In contrast, findings of some other studies showed strong correlation between higher pornography consumption and decreased sexual satisfaction (Vendemia & Coduto, 2022; Wright et al., 2019). However, users of digital technologies continue to engage in conversations of a sexual nature.

It is noteworthy that in the process of engaging in conversations, individuals often engage in private chats where they may exchange personal information such as nude photos and videos. This birthed the idea of sexting, a self-imposed obligation to engage in communication that includes exchange of sexually explicit contents. The term "sexting" is generally understood as the act of sending, receiving, or forwarding contents suggestive of sexual engagements in the form of messages, pictures or video through mobile phones or computer. In agreement, Drouin (2024) asserted that sexting is the act of sending or receiving sexual pictures, videos or words through the use of technology like a mobile phone. Interestingly, the innovation of technologies that greeted the earliest part of the 21st century sparked research interests in related fields of study resulting in different dimensions to the sexting discourse.

Although sexting is often consensual (Vowles, 2022), it sometimes ends in bitter regrets for those involved. There appears to be a strong relationship between acts such as sexting and the way individuals engaged in communication. For instance, research findings published in the Times of India (2023) revealed that partners who exchange sexually explicit messages and are also fond of initiating sex through sexting tend to exhibit avoidant attitudes as well as anxious attachment with their partners whom they are romantically involved with. This is an indication that the act can result in withdrawal and affects self-esteem. Nevertheless, several studies have revealed positive outcomes of sexting to intimacy in relationship (Morgan, 2023; Weiss, 2023).

Therefore, this study sought to find out how sexting affects an individual's sense of pride in addition to identifying the relationship between such exchanges and self-esteem.

Statement of the Problem

In an era of instantaneity and online interactivity, users of various digital platforms have become accustomed to sharing virtually everything with friends and family online. Interest in virtual sex and related activity on the Internet has been on the rise in recent times driven by the digital revolution. Stimulation that is digitised and done remotely is one of the ways people engage in romantic relationships in this digital age and time. Associated concepts are 'camming' which refers to virtual sex done over video chat; 'cybersex', which involves virtual sex done over the Internet using chat rooms, webcams, instant messaging etc.; and 'phone sex', which refers to sexual conversations over the telephone. Sexting is a general understanding of virtual sex through mobile phone network text messaging. The activities are conducted through web-connected tools categorised under the umbrella term "information and communication technology (ICT)."

Studies have shown that new forms of social interaction and participation as well as improved information-access have been created by virtue of the introduction of web-connected ICT – and this has led to a change in communication and everyday life (Castellacci & Tveito, 2018; Schlomann et al., 2020). It is the speed of exchange, ease of access and the instantaneity features that have led to abuse of the web-connected ICTs by users. People have also taken advantage of the assurance of privacy to share all forms of private information online mostly on mediated interpersonal communication. And this is one of the bases for sexting in the digital era. A number of studies have revealed the positives and negatives implications of sexting in our 21st century digital society (Chakraborty, 2022; Maurer, 2024). Some of these studies have identified a link between the act of sexting and self-esteem (Galanis et al., 2023; Verrastro et al., 2023).

The gap from the existing studies is from the methodological perspective as there is a need for variation in methods to generate new insights. From the foregoing, this study was therefore conducted in an attempt to unravel how sexting affects personal sense of pride. It was conducted to further examine the relationship between sexting and self-esteem within the context of individuals' sense of pride. The rationale for examining both the positive and negative effects of sexting is to provide insights on the two dimensions in relation to the self-esteem of 21st century ICT users.

Literature Review

Conceptualising Sexting

The concept can better be understood in component and the use of related concepts and terms. The term "sexting" is derived from two words "sex" and "text." It simply means to share sexual contents via text messages on instant messages or the phone (Miller, 2025). A further conceptualisation sees sexting as a practice that involves the digital production and sharing of nude, semi-nude or other sexually explicit text messages and self-portraits through the use of a mobile phone or any other digital device (Karaian & Tompkins, 2015). It is about contents produced and shared in digital forms – videos, text, audio, pictures relating to the full or half-nakedness of one or both individuals involved in the communication encounter.

Sexting has been further conceptualised as an act of using digital media to send sexually explicit messages or images, typically of oneself, to another (Harris & Hopper, 2019). The implication is that media contents are involved in the act of sexting, and it is usually between parties in a communication process because there is the action of sending contents that are explicit in nature. Another angle from which this can be seen is that sexual messages can be sent or received through technology such as mobile application, phone, email or webcam (whether pre-recorded, live, or on-demand). The web camera inclusion into the foregoing understanding means that the exchange of such sexually explicit contents on live sessions can be considered as sexting.

Understanding the Concept of Pride

Self-esteem is another word for pride. As a concept, pride is perceived as an emotion and so it is often described as an emotion concept (Sznycer & Cohen, 2021; Tracy et al., 2023). As a concept in human psychology, pride is described as a feeling of positive emotion associated with one's own value that is typically generated from one's own accomplishments or abilities, desired possessions, or affiliations with certain social, racial, religious, professional or political groups (Colón, 2024). Among other interpretations, pride can be understood as a feeling of confidence, self-respect, self-worth and satisfaction. To be proud of someone implies that there is some degree of respect for the individual or organisation that one may have certain connections or affiliation with, such as friends, family, hometown or country or even a sport group.

According to Sullivan (2014), pride is a good feeling that arises from an individual's independent assessment of their own relationships, deeds, belongings, identity or personality, all of which are in line with common

cultural and societal ideals. It is important to state here that pride is a complicated feeling as much as it is a complicated concept to describe. Sullivan further notes that the feeling is sometimes confused with having a strong sense of self-worth or having an elevated status in the real or perceived "eyes of other." This study is about how the act of sexting has displaced self-esteem, pride or confidence in oneself.

Sexting as a 21st Century Emotional and Psychological Burden

In recent times specifically since the beginning of the 21st century, there has been an increase in digital technologies and associative/related actionable activities. This has given rise to research relating to digital transformation and acts like sexting, and related explicit forms of communications. In fact, digital technologies are significant to modern day communication. Sexual behaviours and related emotions among adolescents are mediated by digital technologies of a contemporary society (Sciacca et al., 2024). These technologies have become part and parcel of our daily lives just as a lot of young individuals are addicted and glued to their mobile phones. Statistics from a Pew Research study revealed that more than 38 percent of young individuals admitted to spending too much time on their smartphones (Duffy, 2024).

The time spent on social media and the activities engaged in these spaces can create a mental burden on young individuals. According to Chaudhary et al. (2017), there is a correlation between sexting and mental health, and this is based on findings from a number of studies as revealed in the school-based longitudinal survey among youth residents in the US state of Texas. According to a Psychologs Magazine (2024) report, individuals who sent content in a sexting conversation and failed to receive a response may feel anxious, which can lead to sleep problems. Additionally, individuals with a feeling of being coerced or forced to sext are constantly afraid and anxious, the report revealed. Accordingly, sexting was linked with body and self-confidence as any form of disapproval from a recipient may have profound impact on self-esteem of parties in the communication encounter. This makes it a psychological burden.

More often, even consensual sexts find their way into the open Internet space with one of the partners in the communication breaching the trust. Findings of a study by Clancy et al. (2019) showed that such sexts that may be categorised as consensual ended up being disseminated without prior knowledge and consent of the sender. Such actions whether or not maliciously taken may result in serious mental implication for the victim, implying a state of psychological burden. According to Klettke et al. (2019), individuals coerced into sexting stand a higher chance of being depressed, anxious, stressed and a case of diminishing self-esteem. In other words, a sexting situation can snowball into a series of mental health issues on the persons engaged in it – especially when the trust of one of the partners is breached by the other involved in the communication.

According to Weiss (2023), there may be a direct link between an individual's wellbeing and his/her exposure to sexting. The researcher further notes that when it is consensual, there may be an impact on the emotional and psychological wellbeing of the persons involved in it. Sextortion, one of the negative consequences of sexting also has greater dimension of psychological effects on individuals as it could lead to financial losses and then psychological trauma (Tzani, 2022). In essence, sexting could have both short and long-term consequences on individuals. Regardless of the negative consequences, users of the Internet and associated technologies are deeply into sexting. The need to become popular has been identified as one of the factors that could increase the chances of an individual's involvement in the act of sexting (Del Ray et al., 2019). However, the psychological and emotional consequences far more outweigh the benefits.

Empirical Review

While some empirical studies have shown findings that imply a relationship between sexting and self-esteem, others revealed a correlation between sexting, depression, stress, and anxiety among young users of digital technologies. Further studies revealed negative correlation between sexting and psychological wellbeing of members of the public. Reviewed in this section are studies with specific focus on these areas. Findings from a study conducted by Galanis et al. (2023) showed that sexting may lead to increased depression, low self-esteem, increased stress and anxiety. Similarly, Sciacca et al. (2024) revealed a correlation between exchange of sexually explicit pictures and depressive symptoms in boys, and a negative relationship when the same test was conducted on girls. Based on the results of the study, certain factors may be different in respect of impact on boys and girls as demonstrated in the study.

Foody et al. (2021) in a study demonstrated that there are negative implications of sexting as the ugly outcomes may be associated to behavioural defects which may include emotional problems and bad conduct. In a related study, Dojaj et al. (2019) revealed that cases of exchanging sexually explicit contents were more common than posting such material on the Internet. Further results from the study showed that pupils who engaged in sexting were found to be having suicidal thoughts than those who never engaged in such acts. These findings imply that individuals engaged in sexting often have negative thoughts possibly stemming from emotional difficulties or a breakdown (as the case may be).

Sexting many not be a *prima facie* crime when consensual but it has been proven to be a potentially risky behaviour that could result in a number of victimisation scenarios in the form of cyberbullying, sextortion, online grooming; and this is chiefly because teenagers remain a vulnerable group (Gassó et al., 2019). This is

due to technophilia; their limited ability to self-regulate, growing sexual curiosity, and their high susceptibility to pressure from their peers. The vulnerability is glaring just as the negative consequences may be alarming on the young minds who are engaged in sexting.

In contrast, a study conducted by Burić et al. (2020) showed that there was no basis for a relationship between sexting and changes in the psychological well-being of individuals. The researchers further demonstrated that peer conformism had a direct relationship with frequent sexting among girls in their adolescence. The findings from the study are indicative that acts such as sexting may be a non-pathological aspect of the sexual development process of adolescent girls, especially in the middle to late adolescence as seen in our digital age. This is closely related to a study which showed that the exchange of sexually explicit contents among adolescents may be strong point at obtaining validation of their body image, and this is directly linked to an increase in their sense of self-esteem (Holmes et al., 2021).

Sexting has also been found to be an alternative to sexual gratification attainment that some individuals leverage to approach potential partners; it also enables feelings of intimacy and bonding in existing relationships (Doyle et al., 2021). In line with the foregoing, findings revealed that no association exist between sexually explicit content that may be exchanged consensually and negatives like hostility, impulsivity, anxiety, depression, emotion dysregulation, self-esteem, stress, and aggressive temperament among young adults and adolescents of both sexes (Lu et al., 2021). The multidimensional results from different findings on the subject of sexting can be referred to as a split in scholarship, in which different scholars have shown both negative and positive dimensions of sexting. This study also adds to the body of knowledge on the relationship between sexting and self-esteem.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation for this study is the catharsis theory and the theory of planned behaviour. The catharsis theory postulates that when individuals' purpose or strong emotions are repressed in the process sometimes known as "venting," this can lead to alleviation of psychological suffering. According to McQueen and Olsen (2023), the process started when one births the intention to prevent undesirable behaviours through the release of emotions such as fear, anger and trauma that had remained unacknowledged. Considering that sexting may be linked to the need to vent as part of efforts to alleviate the pressure from sexual urge, it is appropriate that this theory provides the theoretical basis for this study. This theory is applied to this study to explain the emotional motivation behind sexting in contemporary society.

Theory of planned behaviour is considered a framework upon which behaviour can be predicted. The theory, also known as the theory of reasoned action talks about three types of belief upon which individual's intention to perform a specific behaviour is predicted, and these are behaviour beliefs, normative beliefs and control beliefs (Etheridge et al., 2023). According to the assumptions, behavioural beliefs may translate to attitude towards the behaviour, normative beliefs relate to perceived attitudes of respected figures and peers toward the behaviour, while control beliefs can also be seen as perceive ability to perform the specific behaviour.

The theory's constructs are attitudes toward behaviour, social norms, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, perceived power, and behavioural intentions (Boyd & Long-Crowell, 2023). Taking cognizance of the role of technology in providing support for sexual behaviour such as sexting, the actions may be driven by accepted behavioural standards, social norms, and opinions shared by others. These constitute the core assumptions of the theory of planned behaviour and provide a justification for its adoption in this study. The theory, as applied in this study, explains why people get involved in the act of sexting.

Methodology

The researchers relied on secondary data sources such as textbooks, the Internet and other published quantitative and qualitative materials to provide insights to sexting and the displacement of pride in a digitised world. Secondary research involves collecting, summarising and synthesising existing data and information from various sources or comparison of previous studies to address the research questions or objectives (Kang & Yang, 2021). Search for literature in the form of secondary data sources was conducted through a web search using major platforms.

Web of Science, Scopus, and PubMed Central were carefully selected as some of the databases included in this study's literature search. Keywords in the search are sexting, displacement of pride and digital technology. Inclusion criteria include the year of publication, scope and the language of publication. Consequently, publications released from 2015-2025 were included while earlier publications were excluded. The same applied to publications in English language being included and those in other languages duly excluded indicating a justification of inclusion and exclusion criteria for this study.

Initial result hit of relevant literature showed over 121,000 publications. This was followed by the initial selection after a careful study of the abstract and findings of the study reviewed. The final selection of 12 relevant studies was the next step. This was based on a purposive review of the relevant studies. Through the synthesis of data, this study adds to the existing body of literature on the subject matter whilst also analysing

diverse perspectives and draw evidence-based conclusions in respect to sexting and displacement of pride or self-esteem in a 21st century society, also referred to as digital age. This is in the form of a thematic analysis and discussion of the findings from the review of secondary data sources.

Results and Discussion

Results of the review showed that (n = 12) implying that this study is based on the analysis of 12 studies that provide insights to the subject matter which is sexting and the displacement of pride in the contemporary 21st century digitised world.

Theme 1: How Sexting Affects Personal Sense of Pride

Sexting, the act of sending sexually explicit messages or images via digital devices, has become increasingly prevalent in the digital age, particularly among adolescents and young adults (Kerpen, 2021). This phenomenon presents a complex interplay between modern communication technologies and individual identity, affecting various aspects of personal and social life. A critical aspect of this study is the focus on how sexting influences an individual's sense of pride and self-esteem. It is critical because it provides a snippet into the intricate issues related to the core objective of this study.

Sexting inherently involves a degree of vulnerability due to the intimate nature of the content being shared. The digital transmission of personal images or messages opens individuals up to the risk of unwanted exposure, especially when the content is shared without consent. The violation of privacy that can occur when sexts are distributed beyond the intended recipient can lead to a profound sense of humiliation and a loss of personal pride. Non-consensual sharing of sexts can result in a significant psychological trauma, as individuals grapple with the loss of control over their personal image and identity (Schmidt et al., 2024). This exposure can exacerbate feelings of vulnerability, leading to diminished self-worth and a tarnished sense of pride.

Sexting can also contribute to the objectification of individuals, reducing them to mere objects of sexual desire rather than acknowledging their full humanity. This is particularly pertinent in the context of gender dynamics, where societal expectations often pressure individuals to conform to specific sexual norms. As Burén (2020) highlights, sexting can reinforce gender stereotypes, with women often facing greater scrutiny and judgement compared to men. This objectification can erode personal pride, as individuals may feel devalued and reduced to their physical attributes rather than being appreciated for their intrinsic qualities and capabilities. Such objectification not only impacts self-esteem but also affects how individuals perceive their worth in social and

intimate relationships.

The digital nature of sexting can also foster unrealistic expectations regarding body image and sexual performance. The curated nature of digital communication allows individuals to present idealised versions of themselves often filtered and edited to meet perceived societal standards of attractiveness. This can create a "disconnection" between an individual's real self and the persona they project online, leading to internal conflict and dissatisfaction. As Merino et al. (2024) note, the pressure to maintain these unrealistic standards can result in heightened anxiety and self-doubt, further undermining personal pride. The discrepancy between online representation and reality can lead to feelings of inadequacy, as individuals struggle to meet the expectations imposed by oneself and peers.

One of the most profound negative effects of sexting is the potential for regret and shame following the sharing of explicit content. The impulsive nature of sexting, often driven by the immediacy and anonymity of digital communication, can lead to decisions that are later regretted. When sexting leads to unintended consequences, such as public exposure or damaged relationships, individuals may experience intense feelings of shame and self-recrimination. Wagner et al. (2021) argue that the internalisation of this shame can significantly impact an individual's sense of pride, as they struggle with the realisation of having compromised their personal values and integrity. This regret can be particularly damaging for adolescents, who are in a critical stage of identity formation and may find it challenging to reconcile their actions with their developing or evolving self-concept.

Theme 2: The Relationship between Sexting and Self-Esteem

While sexting is often associated with negative consequences, it is essential to acknowledge that it can also have complex implications for self-esteem. The relationship between sexting and self-esteem is multifaceted, encompassing both positive and negative outcomes. However, for the purpose of this study, the researchers considered two aspects of the relationship vide the positive and negative outcomes herein referred to as consequences of sexting.

In some contexts, sexting can serve as a means of exploring and affirming one's sexuality, leading to increased self-confidence and self-esteem. For individuals who engage in consensual sexting within the confines of a trusting relationship, the exchange of intimate content can enhance feelings of desirability and empowerment. According to Kerpen (2021), sexting can provide a platform for self-expression and experimentation, allowing individuals to explore their sexual identity in a safe and controlled environment. This exploration can

contribute to a nuanced understanding of one's sexuality and foster a sense of pride in line with one's sexual identity.

Moreover, sexting can facilitate intimacy and connection between partners, strengthening the emotional bond and reinforcing positive self-perception (Ragona et al., 2023; Verrastro et al., 2023). The foregoing explains the positive aspects of the relationship. The researchers considered the various motivations, behaviours and expectations from acts of sexting among young persons. Attention was also not given to the sense of pride of individuals engaged in the act of sexting. These angles provide the lens through which this current study can be rationalised.

Additionally, pressures and sexual gratifications have been identified as some of the most significant reasons for sexting (Dully et al., 2023; Howard et al., Ojeda et al., 2022). In essence, there is a category of individuals that the fulfilment of their sexual desires defines the positive takeaway from the act of sexting. This aligns with the assumptions of catharsis theory that individuals sometimes take certain actions to alleviate psychological sufferings. Gratifying sexual desires through sexting explains this construct of the theory. This is an indication that different societies suffer from a lack of digital literacy among most of their citizens. Evidence from a lack of caution while engaging in conversations that often culminate in sexting to gratify sexual desire highlights this dimension.

Conversely, sexting can also have detrimental effects on self-esteem, particularly when it occurs in a coercive or nonconsensual context. The pressure to engage in sexting, often driven by peer influence or societal expectations, can lead individuals to compromise their boundaries and engage in behaviour that does not align with their values. This coercion can result in feelings of powerlessness and diminished self-worth, as individuals grapple with the internal conflict between their actions and their sense of self. As noted by Olatunde and Balogun (2017), the negative repercussions of sexting, such as public humiliation or damaged reputations, can have long-lasting effects on self-esteem, particularly for young people who are navigating the complexities of identity formation.

The relationship between sexting and self-esteem is further complicated by gender and social dynamics, which can influence the way individuals experience and interpret sexting. Gendered expectations and societal norms often dictate the terms of engagement in sexting, with different implications for men and women. Burén (2020) highlights that women are often subjected to harsher judgement and stigmatisation compared to men, leading to a greater negative impact on self-esteem. This gendered disparity can exacerbate feelings of shame and vulnerability, further undermining personal pride and self-worth. Additionally, social dynamics, such as peer

pressure and cultural norms, can shape individuals' experiences of sexting, influencing how they perceive its impact on their self-esteem.

Conceptual Framework: Sexting and the Displacement of Pride in a Digitised World
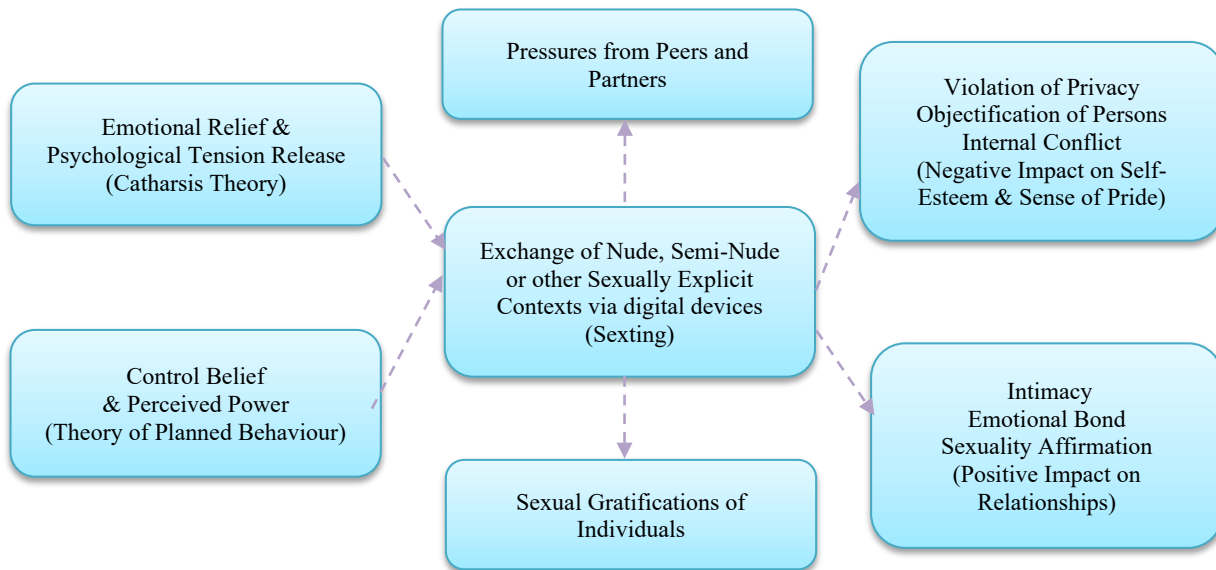
Source: Authors' Elaboration

Conclusion and Recommendations

Sexting represents a complex interplay between digital communication and personal identity, with significant implications for individual pride and self-esteem. While sexting can serve as a means of exploring and affirming one's sexuality, it also poses substantial risks, including vulnerability, objectification, unrealistic expectations, and regret. These factors can erode personal pride and self-esteem, particularly when sexting occurs in a coercive or nonconsensual context. The relationship between sexting and self-esteem is further influenced by gender and social dynamics, which shape individuals' experiences and perceptions. As digital communication continues to evolve, it is crucial to understand the multifaceted impact of sexting on individual identity and well-being, promoting a more nuanced and informed discourse on its implications. From the foregoing, the researchers recommended that:

1. Digital literacy education must be prioritised by all concerned stakeholders. By this, it is advocated that government agencies, international non-governmental and charitable organisations and individuals of goodwill in society should design and implement educational programmes that teach young people about the risks and responsibilities of sexting, including privacy, consent, and long-term consequences.

2.   There is an urgent need to build a culture of open conversations among young persons in our society. By encouraging open conversations, a space will be built that does not necessarily promote self-confidence and validation through sexting among young adolescents in our society. This will create safe spaces for discussions on sexuality, consent, and boundaries to help individuals navigate relationships and enhance self-esteem.

3.   Gender stereotypes should be challenged with a view to address all issues surrounding it. Additionally, it is imperative to work assiduously with all stakeholders to address gendered double standards and stigma associated with sexting to promote equality and support a positive self-image for all individuals.

4.   Provide support for victims who have had to deal with all issues relating to sexting and the consequences associated with shame and guilt from sexting. The concerned groups and individuals should work to establish support systems offering psychological and legal assistance for victims of nonconsensual sexting to help them recover and regain control over their digital identities.

5.   Above all, stakeholders should strive to build a culture that encourages positive online interactions among young people. This will also foster a culture of respectful and consensual digital exchanges to allow individuals explore their identities safely and improve their self-esteem.

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